

The Fighter by paintitblack

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Angst with a Happy Ending, Homophobia, Homophobic Language, M/M, Neil Hargrove Being an Asshole, Physical Abuse, Verbal Abuse

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-01-02

Updated: 2018-03-24

Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:28:17

Rating: Explicit

Warnings: Graphic Depictions Of Violence

Chapters: 5

Words: 7,334

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Steve finds out that Billy is being abused and decides to do something about it.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Views of the characters do not necessarily mirror my own. By this I mean that any thoughts Billy has about himself not being "man enough" are not thoughts I agree with. They are beliefs that come from years of abuse.

Summary for the Chapter:

"Have you seen my hands? Just look at 'em shake." -
The Gaslight Anthem

It's 11:02pm when Billy gets home, but he doesn't go inside until quarter after two. He sits in his car, leaning back into his seat, counting the seconds as they pass by. Eleven o'clock is his curfew, and he missed it. It doesn't matter that it was only by two minutes; it might as well have been two hours, as far as his father is concerned. So he waits those extra three hours and thirteen minutes, hoping that his dad will have fallen asleep by the time he gets inside.

Billy steps out of the car, heart aflutter as he gently closes the door. He strips himself of his jewelry as he walks, tucking his earrings, bracelets, and necklaces in the back pocket of his jeans. He nearly forgets the two hoops he has piercing his lip; they are his most recent, only put into place after Steve Harrington jokingly asked him if he ever thought about bedazzling that smart mouth of his.

The day he walked into school with those two hoops adorning his lower lip was the day Steve turned so red that their gym teacher asked if he needed to go to the nurse.

Billy has worn them every day since.

Slipping those piercings into his jeans as well, he walks up his front steps, hesitating for a moment.

You can leave, he thinks. Right now, you can leave and never come back.

Almost immediately he shakes his head, furious for even allowing the thought to cross his mind. He's seventeen years old, practically a man. He's been handling this since he was a kid; he can handle it for a few more months. But that's only if he goes to college, and ***college is for smart kids, Billy, and you ain't that.***

Ignoring the whisper of his father's voice, Billy opens the front door and steps inside. The floor creaks softly, and he freezes. But when no one comes thundering down the stairs, he continues towards the kitchen. Turning on the sink, he wets his hands and rubs them against his face, wiping away the makeup he applied earlier that day. Fingertips turn black from the mascara and eyeliner, permeated only by the glitter from the light pink eyeshadow and cherry lip gloss. As if the jewelry isn't enough, he can't even imagine how his father would react if he saw this.

But he doesn't have to imagine. He's not even finished drying his face and hands when someone grabs him by the back of his shirt.

Billy barely has the time to wonder *how did I not hear him* when he's pulled back down the hall towards the front door. They've just reached the landing when the two rough hands turn him around, and suddenly he finds himself staring into the face of his father.

"Wait—" he starts, but the protest is cut short when he's shoved down the steps. Billy hits the pavement hard, head pounding with what he's sure is yet another concussion. Pushing himself up onto his elbows, he shuffles backwards, feet scuffing against the ground as he tries to get to get up.

But his dad is too fast, bearing down on him in an instant and knocking him back onto the walkway. Straddling his son's waist, he curls one hand into a fist.

And that's when Billy makes a mistake. He forgets what he's learned, that he's not supposed to fight back or defend himself, that he's just supposed take it until his father is finished punishing him.

Instead, he raises both arms in front of his face, reflexively protecting himself from the inevitable first strike. But it doesn't come, or at least not yet.

Skin flushed with rage, Billy's father decides that he doesn't care that they're outside, doesn't care that someone might see them. They're a hundred yards from the nearest house and, as long as Billy doesn't scream, no one will hear them either.

Taking his son by the wrists, the elder Hargrove pins his hands above his head. And that's when the first hit comes. But it doesn't stop there. He hits the boy over and over again, whaling on him, calling him names, telling him that he wishes he'd never been born.

Eventually Billy relaxes his arms, hoping that the submissive gesture will prompt his father to back off, but it doesn't work. And as the seconds go by, he finds his vision being clouded by the blood that slathers his face. He can taste it in his mouth as well, the metallic burn causing him to choke.

Noticing the boy's struggle to breathe, Billy's father pulls back. He's going to make this last as long as possible, even if it means keeping him home from school for a couple of weeks. He'll just write a note to say that Billy is ill, that he'll finish all of his work at home and be back as soon as he's better. Neil Hargrove is respected enough by the Hawkins community that they'll be more than willing to believe him. He'll probably even get a sad smile or two and a compliment on how good a father he is to take care of his problem-child son.

Tears trace jagged lines through the blood that stains Billy's cheeks, mixing with the remnants of the mascara he wasn't able to remove. The boy cries softly as his father pulls him to his feet, but still he chooses not to fight back, hoping it'll be over soon, *please please let it be over*.

"You're not my son," his father snarls, spit flecking Billy's face. "You're a freak who'd be better off dead." Then he wraps one hand around his throat.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

"I think honest love is less about how much you would do for someone and more about how long you would wait, unable to do anything at all, to do it." - Tyler Knott Gregson

Steve regrets his deal with Dustin the moment he enters the Wheelers' basement.

After his breakup with Nancy, he made the decision to stay as far out of her way as possible. Then Will was possessed, that weird girl reappeared, and he had to use his old nail bat to take out a pack of demodogs.

That last one he didn't mind too much.

Since then, the knockoff Losers Club has adopted him as their guardian, going so far as to calling him "Dad." Mike once even accidentally called him "Mom" and, though he tried to brush it off as a deliberate joke, Steve knows it was a genuine slip of the tongue.

He doesn't fight his new place in the lives of the three boys; to be honest, it takes his mind off of whatever is going on between Nancy and Jonathan. He's not bitter about it, or at least not completely. From time-to-time he even finds himself jealous of her and the fact that she's now with someone she considers to be an incredible guy.

And Jonathan doesn't seem to make a half-bad boyfriend. At the very least, he's smart and attractive, as well as a half-decent kisser.

Steve would never admit it, neither to Nancy nor anyone else, but he and Jonathan had a quick fling just after the monster attack at the Byers' house. It was messy, fueled entirely by adrenaline, and ended after only a week. Under a month later, Steve was back with Nancy, happy and in love, just in time for Christmas. Along with her present, he handed Nancy another box and asked if she would pass it along to Jonathan. It was a new camera, a gift that evolved from the guilt of

having broken his old one.

Now here Steve is, barely three months after the final incident, single and reluctant to mingle. Not one girl has sought him out, choosing to pay attention to Hawkins' new student instead. Unfortunately for them, the sarcastic, brooding Casanova that is Billy Hargrove has his eyes on someone else entirely.

Billy has been a pain in Steve's ass since day one. It seems as though he's doing everything in his power to try and dominate him, whether it be in social settings or out on the court. Normally Steve would just ignore him until he goes away, but that doesn't seem like it's going to happen anytime soon. Even worse, Steve is beginning to enjoy it.

Their confrontation in the locker room confirmed it for both boys. Steve could barely keep his eyes off of Billy, his sculpted figure invoking feelings he'd not felt in over a year. Billy, on the other hand, watched him the entire time; Steve could feel his gaze slide over him as he washed his hair, could feel his breath as the other boy leaned in. Then the water turned off, Billy slapped him on the back, and all of the air left Steve's lungs at once. One last glance below the waist and Billy smiled before walking out, knowing exactly what his touch did to the exasperated Harrington.

Now Steve flirts back, albeit a bit awkwardly, but he's definitely got Billy's attention. Just last week, when Billy was adjusting his earring in the locker room, Steve walked up next to him and gestured towards the piece of jewelry. "Hey, Hargrove," he said. "You ever think of bedazzling that smart mouth of yours?" Blue eyes darted towards Steve, both surprised at the jab and resolved to take what he considered to be a challenge.

One day later and Billy's lower lip was pierced with two silver hoops, his whisper of "bet you wish your girlfriend had these" and a quick tongue wag nearly sending Steve to the floor.

But no matter how well the two seem to get on in private, their public feud with each other still exists. Billy still gives him a shove when he sees him in the hall and does his best to trip him up during scrimmages. Outside of school they avoid each other completely, going so far as to shout insults or make lewd comments if they

happen to run into each other.

Dustin, Will, Mike, and Lucas would never understand their complicated dynamic, especially after the blowout at the Byers' house. They would never believe that Billy, after disappearing for two weeks, approached Steve after school and quietly apologized. They would never understand why Steve forgave him. They would never believe what Steve believed, that there was something else going on, that something had molded Billy into an aggressive, blood-thirsty animal.

Walking down the steps to the Wheelers' basement, Steve decides that this isn't the time or place to think about that. He made a deal with Dustin that he would play Dungeons and Dragons with the boys once a month, so that's just what he'll have to focus on: kicking ass in a game he really knows nothing about.

Dustin greets him with a loud "hello!" that is quickly followed by an irritated Mike complaining that he's late. "Hey," Steve says, pointing his finger in the boy's face, "you shitheads are lucky I'm here at all." Sitting down on a stool far too small for his long legs, he adds, "You know, I've played this twice and I still don't understand it."

"You gotta give it time," Lucas stresses, and Steve's eyebrows go up.

"*Time?* Those two days were like ten hours each!"

Dustin crosses his arms. "You wanna leave?"

"No," Steve replies after a moment.

"Then shut the hell up."

Instead of protesting the kid's language, Steve just grins and rolls his eyes. He might be royally confused by the game, but the rest of the group enjoys it, and that's what matters.

It's a long eight hours before Steve decides that he's finished for the night. Being that it's the weekend, the younger boys are having a sleepover, which means no curfew. This also means that they'll probably be playing Dungeons and Dragons until the sun comes up. Steve, on the other hand, needs to get home. Both of his parents are

out of town for a few days, so he's been put in charge of watching the house. Besides, it's just after one-thirty in the morning, and there's really nothing he wants to do more than go to bed.

After saying goodbye to the boys - and receiving a loud "wuss!" from Mike - Steve walks outside and gets into his BMW. He slides the key into the ignition and turns it, but the car doesn't start. He tries a few more times, exasperated curses whispered to himself as he eventually realizes that there's no point. Sitting back, he runs a hand through his hair, going over his options. He could stay over the Wheelers' tonight, but that would involve being forced to have breakfast with Nancy. He could sleep in his car, but there's no heat and he'd look like a fool when he's discovered the next morning. He could walk, but that would take him close to an hour. Maybe if he—

"Steve?"

There's a sudden *tap-tap* on his window and Steve jumps, hand immediately reaching for the bat he has in the backseat.

"Steve," he hears again, and he pulls the weapon into his lap as he looks in the direction of the voice.

It's Nancy Wheeler, standing out in the cold in just her pajamas and a bathrobe. She gestures for him to get out of the car and, reluctant as he is to talk to her, there's clearly no avoiding a conversation.

Stuffing the keys into his jacket pocket, Steve climbs out of the car, slamming the door shut behind him. He leans the bat against his shoulder, trying to act nonchalant as he asks, "What's up, Nance?"

Too tired to come up with a sarcastic response to the dumb question, she replies, "I heard you trying to start your car and figured you might need a ride."

"I'm fine," Steve says a little too quickly, waving her off.

Nancy makes the same face her brother did when Steve told him he had to leave. "Look, I know you hate me, but—"

"I don't hate you, Nance." He raises his shoulders in a shrug. "I just don't need a ride."

She watches, exasperated, as he heads down their driveway towards the street. "What are you going to do, walk?"

"Looks like it!" He answers without turning around.

Nancy watches him until he disappears around the corner before tightening her robe and going back into the house.

Moving briskly, Steve looks at his watch. It's 1:43am. If he keeps moving at this pace, he'll reach home by two-thirty. He tucks his hands into his sleeves, the tips of his fingers now numb. The only consolation to this hell of a walk is that he'll pass by Billy's house. It's more than likely that he'll be home by now, probably smoking in his room.

Billy usually catches Steve walking past, opening his window and flicking the cigarette at him. He waggles his fingers in a sort of wave and then Steve flips him off, finishing the strange routine. One time, Billy had barely opened the window and offered up a grin when he was jerked back into his room. There were a few moments of unintelligible shouts before Mr. Hargrove moved to the window and looked out. Fortunately, Steve was already safely ducked behind Billy's Camaro, where he remained until he was sure Billy's father was gone.

After that happened, it all made sense: the cuts, the bruises, the time off from school. But Mr. Hargrove was smart in that he only hurt Billy in places that people couldn't see. Steve only noticed the damage because Billy insisted on showering at the same time as him. With his naked body on full display, the scars were easy to pick out. One time he even came to school with his wrist in a brace. "Dislocated," he said when people asked. "Did it playing basketball." Steve was tempted to press, but then decided it wouldn't do any good. Billy would never talk to him about this. It was like everything else: who would believe him?

It takes Steve thirty-six minutes to reach Billy's house, but he hears Mr. Hargrove about a minute before that. Sliding alongside the other boy's car, Steve sees them both in the front yard, Billy's father holding his son by the shirt, shouting expletives as hits him. Steve can see the blood from Billy's ruined face pooling on the

cement around his head and, without thinking, he rises to his full height.

The older Hargrove is just pulling Billy to his feet and taking him by the throat when he notices Steve standing behind the Camaro. Still holding him in an iron grip, he turns his son around so he can see Steve as well. “That your girlfriend?” He asks Billy, just loud enough so that both boys can hear. When nobody answers, he shakes his head and scoffs. “Always knew my son was taking it up the ass.”

Grimacing, Steve looks from Billy to his father. “Mister Hargrove—”

“That why you’re wearing that makeup?” The older man continues, and Billy ducks his head. “You like to suck your friends off and leave lipstick stains on their cocks?”

Steve swings the bat in front of him, the nails clear in the starlight. “I really wish you hadn’t said that,” he sighs, and starts forwards.

Notes for the Chapter:

Finn Wolfhard (Mike Wheeler) was in the movie 'IT' (2017) so I figured I'd add in a small "Loser's Club" reference.

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

“Loving me will not be easy. It will be war. You will hold the gun and I will hand you the bullets. So breathe, and embrace the beauty of the massacre that lies ahead.” - R.M. Drake

Notes for the Chapter:

Neil Hargrove is homophobic as hell. I know I put it in the tags, but I figured I'd give you an extra warning, just in case.

Harrington, you fucking idiot.

That's the only thought running through Billy's mind as he watches the other boy stalk towards him. He can see the weapon in his hand, the nails embedded in the cracked wood bringing back the memory of Max standing over him, threatening to bury them in his crotch if he didn't back off.

When Billy says that he hates Max, he isn't lying. What she did to him in California brought on a beating like nothing he's had before, at least until now. But that doesn't mean he still doesn't try to protect her. He knows in the back of his mind that he goes about it the wrong way, that hurting Max and her friends does nothing more than invoke in them great fear. He likes that, though, the feeling of power, of control. In his own house, he's consistently submitting to his father, the terror that floods his veins every time the older man moves towards him like another blow to his dwindling pride.

The only difference between Billy and Max is that Max decided to fight back, while Billy continues to *just take it like a man*.

Steve is only a few yards away now, the bat held loosely in both hands.

Billy feels his father's breath of laughter on his neck. The older man

is clearly amused by this show that Steve is putting on, but Billy couldn't be more terrified.

With or without a weapon, Harrington is going to get his ass handed to him, only it's going to be far worse than what Billy did.

Neil jerks his son aside, throwing his unresisting body to the ground. "Let's boogie, princess," he says to Steve, then rears back, preparing to throw the first punch.

Steve ducks quickly, Neil's fist passing just a few inches over his head. It's a wild haymaker, fueled by rage and overconfidence, and Steve can't help but notice that he's seen this before. He only vaguely remembers his fight with Billy, but what he *does* remember is how out-of-control Hargrove was. The punches he threw were outrageously powerful, but they were also reckless. If Steve was just as strong as him, he might've won the fight, if only through patience and finesse, neither of which Billy or his father seem to have.

Rising from his crouch, Steve swings the bat as hard as he can, embedding the nails in Neil's calf.

The older man roars in anger, brought to one knee by the agony that courses through his leg.

Steve jerks the weapon free of his flesh and pulls back, suddenly unsure as to what he's supposed to do next. He can't kill Neil, no matter how much he wants to, but he doesn't want to spare him either. He doesn't have to look at the other boy's crumpled body to know that this is something that will take him weeks, if not months, to come back from. And even if Billy manages to heal physically, there's still his emotional state to worry about. Years of abuse at the hands of Neil Hargrove has clearly warped Billy into the animal with whom Steve has become infatuated.

The question isn't if Billy is willing to change; it's a question of whether he is actually capable of retaining his softness after over a decade of degradation.

And perhaps the first step on this road to recovery is the death of the abuser.

Content with the idea, Steve hoists the bat up over Neil's head. But before he can bring it down, he hears a soft "don't" coming from Billy's direction.

The younger Hargrove has managed to pull himself into a sitting position, and he frantically shakes his bloodied head at Steve before repeating, "Don't."

Steve isn't sure who Billy is trying to protect: Steve from going to prison, or himself from being the recipient of another beating if his father survives. Either way, the decision has been made, and the older boy decides to acquiesce to Billy's request. But just because he can't kill Neil doesn't mean he can't hurt him. Tossing the bat aside, Steve decides to go after him with his fists, again sending the thought *Harrington, you fucking idiot* through Billy's mind.

Before Steve can even get into a position to throw a punch, however, Neil rushes him, arms wrapped around his waist as he tackles him to the ground. Struggling to get his breath back, the boy tries to pick himself up, but Billy's father is already towering over him.

The first kick isn't as agonizing as Steve thinks it will be. "Shock," Nancy probably would have told him. "It's the shock." But then the second kick comes and Steve feels like someone's slid a knife between his ribs. Unlike Billy, he vocalizes his pain, groaning loudly as Neil continues his assault. After about ten seconds, the older Hargrove pauses, rolling Steve onto his back and placing a foot on his chest.

"Harrington, right?" Neil says as the boy squirms in his grip. "You know, you're exactly like your old man described you: tall, big hair... too smart for your own good." He feels Steve digging his nails into his shoe and presses down a bit harder. "So tell me, princess. How'd a skinny queer like you manage to make my son his bitch?" When Steve doesn't reply, his voice grows a bit louder. "Answer me," he orders, then again: "*Answer me.*"

Locking eyes with Neil, Steve curls his mouth into a snarl and spits out two words: "Fuck you."

"No, that's Billy's job, remember?" The older Hargrove shoots back, then raises his foot.

But he never gets the chance to bring it down because suddenly his son is there, driving his shoulder into his chest and knocking him off his feet.

The moment Neil hits the ground is the moment Billy realizes what he's done.

He fought back.

No, he did more than that. He attacked his father with the intent of hurting him, and it worked. Blood spills from the older man's nose and Billy's face goes white with horror.

Fingers touching gingerly at the broken bones, Neil looks up at his son. Interestingly enough, his anger seems to have taken a backseat, making room for curiosity. Billy has only done something like this once before, back when they were in California, and Neil was sure he'd learnt his lesson. But now it appears that he was wrong, that he'll have to punish Billy like he did last time, maybe even more to keep him away from Steve. No matter how far he takes it, however, he knows he's going to enjoy it.

Slowly, Neil pushes himself up onto his knees.

And that's when Billy picks up the bat.

Notes for the Chapter:

There will be an explanation of what happened in California at some point, so don't worry about that.

4. Chapter 4

Summary for the Chapter:

“Just remember, that power... it doesn't control you.
You control it.” - Sam Winchester

Steve has never said Billy's first name.

It's always been “dickhead” or “jackass” or “fucknuts.” And Billy usually takes the insults and throws them right back at Steve. There was one time, however, that he didn't.

It was a week or two after Nancy had hooked up with Jonathan, and Billy was really giving it to Steve in the locker room. It wasn't anything more than the usual: a few quips about Nancy being a whore and a joke or two about Steve's libido.

But Steve wasn't in the mood to hear any more snide comments about his broken relationship. And so, not paying any thought to the fact they were both completely naked, Steve took Billy by the arms and slammed him against the wall.

Billy's initial reaction was absolute shock, but it quickly morphed into what almost looked like excitement as he gave a teasing grin.

Water dripped from Steve's hair onto the tan of the other boy's neck. “Shut up,” he hissed through his teeth. “You *freak*.”

Billy looked like he'd been slapped. The smile was gone from his face, arms slack in Steve's grip. And when he looked at Steve, it was as though he was looking at someone else.

Until now, Steve didn't have an explanation as to why the word caused Billy to react like that. Nonetheless, Steve never used it again.

The closest Steve has actually gotten to saying Billy's name is when he's sneered the occasional “Hargrove” in his direction, but that's never felt right. Using his last name allowed him to toe the line of friendship without making it too intimate. It seems foolish, but both of them know that once Steve allows “Billy” to breach his quivering

lips, there'll be no going back.

Seeing the younger Hargrove standing over his father, however, Steve doesn't even hesitate.

"Billy," he calls softly, and the other boy tenses up. "It's okay. It's okay, Billy, you're okay."

The bat wavers slightly and Neil looks almost disgustedly at Steve.

But Steve just continues to talk, voice as gentle as he can make it, repeating his name: "Look at me, Billy," he says. "It's okay, Billy, look at me."

The younger Hargrove exhales, breath shaky as he stares down at his father. Blood from his face *drip-drip-drips* onto one of Neil's boots. He knows he won't last much longer; he can feel himself fading, the pain behind his ears trying to pull him into the dark. But that can't happen, not yet. He has to finish this first. He has to *kill him kill him kill him kill*

"Billy, please."

Without thinking, Billy turns around, reflexively prepared to tell Steve off. But then their eyes meet, and that's when Steve's heart breaks.

Billy doesn't look angry or vengeful; he looks lost and terrified, like a small child. For the briefest of moments, Steve catches a glimpse of the real Billy: the one who lost a mother, the one whose father was never satisfied, the one who just wants to hear his name spoken without it being followed by an act of malice.

"That's good, Billy." Steve smiles, fighting a wince as he slowly gets to his feet. He has what must be a cracked rib or two, but he barely feels it. All of his attention is on his friend. "That's real good. Now can you--- can you do me a quick one and give me the bat?"

Billy looks at the weapon as though seeing it for the first time. He looks at the nails, at the metal tips already wet with his father's blood. Gaze dropping to the man at his feet, he opens his mouth as though he's about to say something.

Steve doesn't give him the chance. "Don't look at him, Billy. He's nothing, okay? *Nothing*." He takes a step forwards and the other boy immediately turns to him, bat raised even higher over his father's head. Steve stops and holds up both hands. "And I get it, Billy. I get that you want him dead. So do I. But killing him..." He shakes his head. "It won't help." Hazel eyes try desperately to connect with the other boy's blue. "Don't let him win, Billy. Don't let him make you into something you're not."

Billy swallows, allowing the weapon to drop a few inches. All his life, he's wanted nothing more than to defeat his father, to beat him within an inch of his life. If he could, he'd shove the entire bat down his throat, joy coursing through his veins as the nails tear him apart from the inside out. And he would love every second of it.

But right now he doesn't feel excited, or giddy with anticipation. He doesn't feel happiness at the thought that bringing that bat down even *once* could get rid of all of his problems.

He doesn't feel anything.

So when Steve says his name again, even more breathlessly than the first, Billy lets himself go.

Steve rushes forwards, dropping to his knees and catching him before he can hit the ground. "Hey," he murmurs as he curls one arm around his waist. "You're okay."

Head resting on Steve's shoulder, Billy closes his eyes as tight as he can. Tears threaten to expose the pain he feels, and there's nothing he can do about it. His entire body shakes as he cries silently, but Steve just holds him even closer, whispering his name into his ear.

"You're okay, Billy," Steve says quietly. "You're going to be okay." Sliding one hand along the length of Billy's arm, he gently touches the handle of the bat. "I'm going to take this now," he continues, narrating his movements. The last thing he wants to do is give the boy any more surprises. "You hearin' me?" Feeling Billy's nod, he takes the weapon from his weakening grip.

Both hands now free, Billy takes hold of Steve's shirt and digs his

nails into the fabric. His voice is almost desperate as he asks, "Can we go?"

"Yeah, Billy." Steve smiles against his cheek. "We can go." Swiveling the bat, he uses his other arm to hoist the boy to his feet. They've both reached a standing position when suddenly Billy gasps and jerks away.

Steve catches him by the hip and looks over his shoulder to see Neil standing right behind him, fingers entangled in the boy's hair. "Fuck off!" He barks, then kicks him squarely in the balls.

Neil immediately releases his son, allowing Steve to pull Billy behind him. Covering his crotch with both hands, he looks at both boys with barely contained fury.

"Oh, you didn't like that?" Steve asks mockingly. "Well, let me tell you something." He points the bat at Neil, daring him to make a move. "If you *ever* come near Billy again, this 'skinny queer' is gonna cut off your dick and feed it to you. Now, I don't know about you, but that's really not what I like to get into on Saturday nights."

The older Hargrove looks from one boy to the other, considering his options.

But Steve doesn't allow him more than a couple seconds hesitation. "I mean, I could do it right now if you want. I figured I'd wait, but..." He trails off as Neil finally drops the smug expression and backs away.

Relief washes over Steve. He's shocked that the older Hargrove didn't try to fight his way out. He thought maybe it'd be like the movies, where Neil would grab the weaponized end of the bat - not even reacting as a nail goes through his palm - and toss it aside before beating them both to death with his bare fists.

Instead, Neil Hargrove surrendered. And that genuinely worries Steve more than anything else.

The same can be said for Billy, whose trembling fingers aren't even capable of pulling the car keys from his pocket when Steve asks for

them.

Throwing Billy's arm over his shoulder, Steve dips his hand into one of the tightness of his friend's jeans and takes the keys out himself.

"I'll call the cops!" Neil shouts from the front steps as they hobble away from him.

Steve opens the Camaro's passenger-side door. "And tell them what?" He replies as he helps Billy into the car. "That we attacked you first?" Looking back at the older man, he scoffs. "Hopper's gonna get one look at his face and know that you're lying out of your ass."

Neil's lips pull back into a snarl, but he doesn't say anything else.

Steve slams the door shut. "That's what I thought." Walking around to the other side of the car, he lets himself in and sits down behind the wheel.

Billy is still shaking, hugging himself as he stares out the window at his dad. Twenty yards and a pane of glass are all that separate them. His eyes flick to the boy who saved his life.

Twenty yards, a pane of glass, *and* Steve Harrington.

Praying silently as he slips the keys into the ignition, Steve gives a quiet "oh thank fuck" as the Camaro roars to life. "Let's get outta here," he says, then shifts the car into drive.

Notes for the Chapter:

Canonically, Steve has never said Billy's name. Billy has also never said Steve's name, or at least without putting the title "King" in front of it.

You have no idea how many times I went through their interactions to make sure I didn't miss something.

Also! I know a lot of you were rooting for Billy to kill his father. To be honest, I initially wanted the same thing. But if Billy is going to have a successful redemption arc, I can't turn him into a murderer.

That doesn't mean Neil will get away with it though.

If you disagree with me about what I just said, watch 'TT' and keep an eye on Henry Bowers. Then we can talk.

Oh and the reason Steve keeps on saying Billy's name is because it's a good way to both keep his attention and personalize everything that's going on. If Billy managed to separate his feelings from the situation, he'd probably have brought that bat down on his father's head.

Billy needs to use the bat at some point in season 3
okay @ Duffer Brothers are you listening to me

To the people who are reading 'Consequences' as well: don't worry, I'll be back writing those boys real soon. I'm just finishing this up first.

5. Chapter 5

Summary for the Chapter:

“You’re in a car with a beautiful boy, and he won’t tell you that he loves you, but he loves you. And you feel like you’ve done something terrible, like robbed a liquor store, or swallowed pills, or shoveled yourself a grave in the dirt, and you’re tired. You’re in a car with a beautiful boy, and you’re trying not to tell him that you love him, and you’re trying to choke down the feeling, and you’re trembling, but he reaches over and he touches you, like a prayer for which no words exist, and you feel your heart taking root in your body, like you’ve discovered something you didn’t even have a name for.” - Richard Siken

The Camaro is a beautiful car.

Not the most practical car but, by God, is it beautiful.

Steve can only imagine what it must’ve been like out in the California heat, the dark tan of Billy’s legs burning hot against the leather seats. The air conditioning was probably always at half-blast, just enough to keep him cool but not enough to ruin his hair. Much like he does now, Billy probably played music incessantly - hard rock, no brainer - though Steve wonders for a brief moment if that’s just a front. The car itself is a clear extension of Billy’s personality, or at least his attempt to overcompensate for whatever behavior his father finds distasteful.

Glancing in his friend’s direction, Steve realizes that he’s not wearing his usual earring, the dangling one that he sometimes flicks when he’s passing Billy in the hall. Those two silver *bet you wish your girlfriend had these* hoops are gone too, as is his necklace. Steve surmises that they’re all probably in the car or hidden deep in one of his pockets, either way putting the jewelry out of Neil’s line of sight. Unfortunately, the streaks of mascara that blur with the blood on his face are quite obvious. Steve doesn’t need to guess what Neil’s reaction was to that.

Steve taps his thumb anxiously against the steering wheel. He's made the executive decision to drive them back to his house. It'll be completely empty for the next few days, and he's sure there must be a first aid kit hidden somewhere in the bathroom. The worst will be if Billy needs stitches. Steve grimaces at the thought.

"Max..."

The sound of Billy's voice diverts Steve's attention immediately, and he puts a hand on the other boy's arm.

Billy flinches away, the movement prompting an agonized moan. He's trying to keep up appearances, that much is clear; showing weakness is not in his repertoire. But even someone like him can only take so much pain.

"Max," he repeats, and suddenly Steve understands.

Neil Hargrove is wildly unpredictable, but even abusers keep to certain patterns.

An eighteen-year-old scarecrow of a boy knocked him on his ass and got away with it. That's never happened before. Steve emasculated him, and whatever rage he felt while he still had his hands on Billy will have multiplied exponentially since the two boys left. But with the main focus of his aggression now taken from him, he'll turn on someone else.

And there are two other people living in the Hargrove house.

Steve hisses as he jerks the wheel to the left, his curse of "shit" barely perceptible over the groan of the brakes. The car does a one-eighty before he shifts gears and hits the gas, doubling their previous speed.

"Harrington, what are you---" Billy gulps a breath, scrambling for some purchase on the leather seat. "What are you doing?" His voice has dropped a couple of octaves, achieving a deepness that he only uses when he's making a threat.

They ride in silence for a few moments before Steve finally concedes, "Hopper. I'm taking you to Hopper."

Billy's eyes go wide, panic overwhelming him as he grabs at Steve's arm. His iron grip nearly pulls them off the road.

"Cut it out!" Steve yells, trying to pry himself loose. "Fuck, Billy, let go of me!"

But Billy just pulls him closer, fingers wound tightly around his wrist. "No cops, okay? No cops!" Feeling Steve's resistance, he shifts in his seat, the other boy's knuckles scant inches away from his lips. "My father will fucking *kill* me, Harrington! He'll fucking *kill* me!"

Steve slams on the brakes, his entrapped arm stretching out in front of Billy to keep him from going through the windshield.

With a surprised gasp, Billy releases him, and that's when Steve takes him by the shirt.

"Listen to me, Billy," he starts, but the other boy just tries to make another grab at him. "*Hey!*" He catches his friend by the wrist. "Listen to me! I am trying to *save* your fucking *life*, okay? And this - going to Hopper - is the only way to keep Max safe, the only way to keep *you* safe!"

"Please." Billy looks him directly in the eyes, thinly-veiled desperation leaking from his words. "You don't know what he'll do to me."

Softening his grip, Steve pulls back. He shouldn't be touching him like this; not now, not ever. While Billy might not have a problem pinning other people down, the reverse invokes a visceral reaction. Steve reminds himself as he lets go to never take hold of Billy like that again.

"We're just going to Hopper," he says softly. "Not the station, not the hospital. Just Hopper." Not waiting for a response, he toes the gas, gently nudging them up to twenty miles per hour.

"Just Hopper," Billy repeats. "Nobody else."

Without really thinking about it, Steve lays his right hand atop Billy's left. "Nobody else." He smiles slightly as the other boy responds by turning them palm-to-palm and allowing their fingers to intertwine.

They settle into each other's touch, their heavy sighs like waves falling from the mouth of a broken dam. In this moment, both Steve and Billy feel more comfortable than they have since they were little kids, since life became a responsibility and not just something they could enjoy.

Billy thumbs at Steve's knuckle. "Keep talking."

Eyebrows go up. "What?"

The younger Hargrove glances towards his window. "I, uh..." He clears his throat. "I like the sound of your voice."

Steve exhales a laugh, earning himself an irritated glare. "Alright, alright," he says. "I'll talk."

Keeping a tight hold on Steve's hand, Billy leans against the door and closes his eyes.

The older boy watches him for a moment. "You're not a bad guy, Billy," he begins. "I mean, you're kind of an asshole, but you don't *have* to be, you know? I..." He trails off. "I'm not very good at this, am I?"

Billy huffs softly in what Steve can only assume is whole-hearted agreement.

Steve looks out at the long, empty road in front of them. Ten minutes. He can keep a conversation going for ten minutes.

"You know what I thought the first time I saw you?" His eyes flick to Billy, a goofy grin on his face. "I thought, '*damn*, that's a nice ass.' Then I remembered Nance was standing right next to me, but she was looking at you too, so..." He chuckles at the memory. "*Everyone* was, really. Can you blame 'em? New kid pulls into the parking lot in a fucking *Camaro* with *California* plates and, to top it off, he's wearing jeans tighter than a new baseball glove."

Spotting a stop sign, Steve slows down. "And what about that Halloween party, huh? To be honest, I didn't want to go in the first place, but Nance was feeling shitty and I thought it would cheer her up. But then *you*..." He shakes his head as he picks up speed. "You

walked in like you owned the place. Keg King Billy Hargrove, leather jacket and all. I'm willing to bet half the girls there would've been willing to lick the beer off of your chest." The seat squeaks as he adjusts his position and quietly adds, "Maybe a couple of guys too."

When Billy doesn't deal out a negative response, Steve allows himself a sigh of relief. "I've been wanting to tell you something for awhile," he says, trying to regain his confidence. "I've been thinking about it since you apologized for kicking my ass."

They pass one, two, three more side streets before Steve works up the courage to say, "Nancy told me she didn't love me. At the Halloween party, I mean. I'm still not sure what was a lie and what wasn't. Maybe she stopped loving me, or maybe... maybe she never did." He shrugs. "I don't know. And seeing her with Jonathan just made it worse, especially when everyone else found out. Well, *you* know that; you gave me shit too. But you also got Tommy to back off, so I guess it all shakes out."

The day Tommy insulted Steve in the showers was the same day he ended up a broken nose and a face full of glass. Steve himself wasn't there to see it, but Mike told him all about it later. Apparently the moment Billy and Tommy stepped out of the gym, the former took the latter by the back of the neck and shoved him through a trophy case. When asked later why he did it, Billy apparently responded, "He's an asshole. Do I really need another reason?"

Steve smiled at that.

The next week Will would inform him that, when Max heard what had happened, her only response was a muttered, "That's gay."

Steve immediately went bright red, but Will didn't say a word. The younger boy had tentatively asked him early on if there was a reason why Billy wouldn't go out with any of the girls at school. "Is he..." Will hesitated, clearly nervous about what he wanted to ask. "Is he *allowed* to like someone else?" Without thinking, Steve replied, "I hope so."

Steve turns the wheel, heading up the long road to Hopper's house. "I liked you," he says suddenly, not bothering to continue with the

preamble. “And unless I’m a complete dumbass, I’m pretty sure you liked me too. Then we had that fight, and I’m really not sure why I held on. Not in a million fucking years did I think you’d apologize, but then you did. And that’s when I figured it out. You’re a smart, funny, beautiful guy, and yeah, you give out a lot of shit, but I’m sure at home you take a hell of a lot more. You’re brave and, even though you’re not gonna believe me, you’re kind. You proved that tonight when you spared the biggest bag of dicks I’ve ever met. And I know this isn’t the right time or the right place, but I need to tell you something: I don’t like you.” He looks over at Billy. “I love---”

Steve cuts himself off, the other boy’s closed eyes, loose grip, and slow rise and fall of the chest making it clear that he’s fallen asleep. “Right,” he says quietly, regret colouring the word. Maybe he should be glad that Billy didn’t hear what he said. No matter his reaction, they could never be together; most of Hawkins would make sure of that. And this love confession, which he thought would make him feel better, has only created a sort of numbness in his chest. “I’m sorry,” he adds pointlessly, then slows the car to a stop as they pull up in front of Hopper’s house.

Notes for the Chapter:

This book will be updated once I finish 'Consequences,' so don't worry about that.

I don't hate Nancy. I was slightly devastated on Steve's behalf when she had the confession in the bathroom at the Halloween party. But I still like her a lot and I think she and Jonathan work well together.

Also, uh, Will Byers is canonically gay, so...